Creating Historical Consciousness:
A Case Study Exploring Museum Theater

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* All photographs were taken by the author.

Abstract

This master's project asserts that there is a gap between academic and public interpretations of history and that historical museums have the opportunity and the responsibility to help narrow this gap by presenting more complete and complex historical narratives. This case study describes how museum theater was developed and implemented to enhance the historical exhibit, *Spirit of the West*, at High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Through the innovative use of volunteers, High Desert Museum was able to create a trained and dedicated corps of performers to portray historical characters. This study explores the process and results of the museum's strategies.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background to the Study

This study began with my own enthusiasm for history and my disappointment in the simplified and often boring versions of history offered by many museums and historic sites. During a summer internship at High Desert Museum (HDM) in Bend, Oregon, I learned that the museum planned to launch a museum theater program that would be used to interpret historical exhibits. Theater seemed an innovative method for bringing history to life. I became interested in the museum's motivations for initiating this program, the processes involved in planning and implementing the program, and the museum's overall goals and expectations for the project. There were also logistical questions: Who would administer the program and how would it be funded? What challenges would the program face? I wanted to know if museum theater could help create more dynamic and complete historical narratives in the museum's historical exhibits. In other words, could museum theater help create historical consciousness among museum visitors? While an evaluation of the affects of museum theater on visitors' levels of historical understanding is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that my curiosity about the ability of theater to impact visitors' perceptions of history was a primary motivation for this research. This case study is an account of High Desert Museum's conception, planning, and implementation of museum theater for historical exhibits.

Problem Statement

America Does Not Know Its History

Most Americans have a limited understanding of the people and events that have shaped the history of this country. Only one in six Americans ever take a history class after high school (Loewen, 1999). Instead, most Americans learn history from films, television, and theme parks, vehicles of popular culture which often inaccurately depict the past. Each year, about one quarter of American adults seek to learn history through seemingly more authentic means and travel to heritage sites across the country. Unfortunately, even these destinations are guilty of presenting simplified and even erroneous versions of the past (Corkern, 2004; Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Loewen, 1999). Exhibits at historic sites often tell the story of wealthy white people who have had an impact on democracy, "progress," or simply "good taste" in America (e.g., Corkern, 2004; Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Hobbs, 2001). These kinds of historical narratives depict simplified, linear explanations of people, events, and trends in history that do not include the variety of perspectives necessary to put history into context and thus give it meaning (Duensing, 1999; Wallace, 1996). Historical exhibits offering these types of interpretations distort public perceptions and contribute to the disparity between public and academic understandings of history (Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Loewen, 1999). This phenomenon contributes to a frightening reality: America does not know its history.

Misapprehensions in Historical Exhibits

Several examples of exhibits across the country illustrate the inaccurate and simplified historical narratives that are offered for public consumption. While there are

various reasons why history museums and historic sites might exhibit flawed interpretations, this paper does not attempt to comprehensively identify or analyze them. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to note that scholars have identified personal biases, political and social climate, and economic trends as some of the factors which have contributed to inaccurate interpretations (e.g. Corken, 2004; Eichstedt & Small; West, 1999). One example of misinterpretation in historical museums is the narrative offered at the Orchard House Museum, Louisa May Alcott's home, in Concord, Massachusetts. The museum was founded and originally interpreted in the late nineteenth century during a time when the area was experiencing a population boom caused by increasing immigration. While world and national events spurred this trend in immigration, the issue was quickly localized as Concordians sought to protect their city from the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants who, they believed, did not keep "proper" houses. Many patriotic societies sprang up in Concord in defense of domestic "American" ideals. It was one such society that founded the Orchard House and interpreted Louisa May Alcott's life in the home as an example of "perfect domesticity" (West, 1999). Historian Patricia West argues that Louisa May Alcott's progressive and entrepreneurial lifestyle during the previous century was not consistent with the portrayal of her refined methods for keeping a home.

Historian James Loewen (1999) has also identified many inaccurate histories presented at historic sites across the nation and has dedicated an entire book to locating and reporting the discrepancies. One of his examples is Ivy Green, Helen Keller's Alabama home. According to Loewen, the site has been interpreted in such a way that it

"disables Helen Keller more completely that the childhood fever that made her blind and deaf" (p. 243). Nowhere in the house is Keller's dedication to socialism, civil rights, and the women's movement represented. Not only are aspects of Keller's principles omitted, but the confederate flag hanging next to her statue is a symbol in *opposition* to the ideals she held, a blatant misinterpretation of her life. Loewen declares, "Visitors may not agree with all of Keller's positions, but that is no excuse to silence her" (p. 245). These examples join a host of other historical events such as the Civil War, the Women's Suffrage Movement, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement that are misinterpreted at history museums and historic sites across the country (e.g., Hobbs, 2001; Loewen, 1999; Eichstedt & Small, 2002).

Beyond historic homes and heritage sites, even leading museums like those operated by Smithsonian Institution have faced challenges which illustrate the gap between public and academic perceptions of history. Recent controversies surrounding the exhibits *The West as America* (1991), *Enola Gay* (1995), and *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (1998) have demonstrated that even with adequate human and financial resources, an institution cannot necessarily convey complex or controversial history to an unwilling and uninformed public (Goldberg, 1999; Harris, 1995). In these instances, academic historians presenting complex historical narratives were forced to modify and omit exhibit content because of pressure from political and media sources (e.g., Goldberg, 1999; Harwit, 1996; Leibhold, 2000). The expertise offered by the historians, curators, and advisory board members responsible for the research and planning of these

large-scale exhibits was dismissed in favor of historical narratives that would be better received by the public.

Museums Can Help Americans Learn History

These examples of misrepresentations and misapprehensions of history contribute to the gap between academic and public interpretations of history and have left much of America with distorted understandings of the past (e.g., Goldberg, 1999; Loewen, 1999; Woods, 1995).[1] According to Eichstedt and Small (2002), this lack of historical perspective is deeply troubling and only "perpetuates lies which corrode the lives of all they touch" (p. 257). The continued growth of heritage tourism across the country suggests that history museums have a considerable impact on what people learn about history (Corkern, 2004; Loewen, 1999). Scholars and museum professionals agree that history museums have a responsibility to educate visitors by offering more complete and complex versions of history (Hobbs, 2002; Loewen, 1999; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). Complete and complex historical narratives are those interpretations of history that use current scholarship to uncover changing perceptions and new evidence. These may include previously unheard voices and considerations that inform a broader context of the historical period portrayed. The periodic re-interpretation of history, based on emerging scholarship and fresh understandings uses all the available evidence to improve and democratize understandings of history.

But simply enriching historical interpretation with more complexity is not sufficient. The controversies engulfing the Smithsonian Institution's historical

[1] For a complete discussion of the significance of learning history to contemporary society, see Mike Wallace's 1996 text, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* from Temple University Press.

exhibitions have taught scholars and museum professionals that incorporating multiple perspectives with creative presentation techniques is essential if an exhibit is to effectively communicate ideas to visitors (e.g. Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Hayashi, 2003; Leibhold, 2000; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). Recent scholarship suggests that by encouraging collaboration among historians, museum professionals, and the public, history museums can incorporate complex historical narratives into dynamic learning environments that can engage a variety of museum visitors (e.g., Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Gardner, 2004; Hayashi, 2003). In an address to the National Council on Public History, Smithsonian curator James Gardner (2004) declared that public historians must be "advocates" for both history and visitors. In other words, historical interpretation must consider the diverse learning styles of the public as well as the complexity and diversity of the past.

Significance of the Study

Although current literature clearly outlines the need for change in historical exhibit content as well as presentation methods, there is little scholarship offering precise techniques and formulas with which to accomplish these goals. This study is significant because it addresses the lack of scholarship by exploring museum theater as a means for presenting complex history to the public. At the 2005 American Association for Museums (AAM) conference, museum theater was discussed as a technique that may help make complete and complex historical exhibits more acceptable to museum visitors. Museum theater refers to both scripted and impromptu encounters between actors and museum visitors that are designed to provide a compelling experience for the visitor while incorporating the historical narratives relevant to the exhibit or museum. According to

the International Museum Theater Alliance (IMTAL), museum theater may include first and third person interpretation, living history, re-enactments, role-play, puppetry, storytelling, and a variety of additional performance styles.[2] Museum visitors may be spectators or may become active participants of museum theater; the production may be scheduled or informally encountered and may take place on stages or simply in exhibit or other museum spaces. There are many ways in which museum theater may be presented, but like other more traditional forms of theater, it must include characters who encounter some form of conflict. It is only through conflict that the audience has the opportunity to become emotionally and intellectually connected to the topic. According to both museum theater practitioners and educational theorists, the audience's emotional connection to a performance is the building block for educational opportunities (Bridal, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hughes, 1998). This is of particular significance in the realm of museum theater since the educational component of the piece is often its primary goal.

Supporters of museum theater suggest that theatrical presentations allow for the exploration of the complex and controversial nature of history from a variety of perspectives while they also engage visitors emotionally (Bridal, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 1997; Hughes, 1998). Tessa Bridal's recently published study on museum theater found that in those museums that have launched museum theater programs, the programs are meeting and exceeding various goals and expectations of the programs' parent organizations (2004). Bridal describes several instances in which museum theater has

[2] For further discussion of and precise definitions of museum theater, see IMTAL's Web site at http://www.imtal.org/keyDefs.php.

helped a museum successfully meet goals to engage visitors with specific topics, teach particular themes, increase museum attendance and membership, and enhance overall visitor enjoyment. George Buss of the Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts argues, "museum theater exists to make the visitor care enough to learn. . . . to evoke emotion for the purpose of learning" (as cited in Bridal, 2004, p. 4). With such positive results from a variety of museums, museum theater will likely continue to grow in popularity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to address the lack of scholarship detailing techniques for presenting more complete and complex history. It will describe the process by which museum theater was developed and implemented for the historical exhibit *Spirit of the West* at High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Findings from this study, in the form of "lessons learned," will help museums identify ways to incorporate museum theater as a method for presenting complex historical narratives. It may also help to inform the way museum visitors learn history.

Site Description

High Desert Museum evolved from the Western Natural History Institute, which was founded in 1974 by wildlife and environmental enthusiast Donald M. Kerr. In 1982, the Institute became High Desert Museum. Since its inception, HDM has continued to expand its collections and in 1999 was accredited by the American Association of Museums (Waterston, 2002).

The museum's mission states, "Through exhibits, wildlife, and living history, High Desert Museum creates learning experiences to help audiences discover their connection

to the past, their role in the present, and their responsibility to the future" (High Desert Museum, 2006). The museum continues to modify its organizational structure in order to serve its mission through the best use of available resources. High Desert Museum is a nonprofit organization with a 501c(3) tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. As such, HDM measures its success according to how well its mission is accomplished, and not by its financial status alone.

Located three miles south of downtown Bend, High Desert Museum is set in a natural environment. Currently occupying approximately 40 of the135 total acres it owns, the museum incorporates indoor and outdoor exhibits, which feature art, natural and cultural history, and wildlife of the High Desert region. The main building, an impressive 53,000-square-foot structure, houses exhibits, a gift shop, café, classrooms, and museum offices (see Figure 1). The three main exhibit halls in the building are: 1.) *Spirit of the West*, a set of eleven walk-through dioramas chronologically depicting the history of the High Desert region; 2.) *The Hall of Plateau Indians*, an exhibit that incorporates dioramas, fish tanks, interactive exhibits, and a film on the traditional and contemporary cultures of American Indian groups of the High Desert; and 3.) *The Desertarium*, a display that interprets small wildlife of the region. Specific animals in the exhibit change according to animal needs and availability.[3] In addition to these three main exhibit halls, changing exhibits rotate through open gallery space. At the time of this writing, these

[3] All animals on display at HDM are unable to live on their own in the wild. Some are found in the wild too injured to survive on their own and others have been raised or interfered with by humans. While some animals are able to recuperate at HDM, and return to the wild, others are never able to return to their natural environments. They become permanent residents at the museum.

exhibits included a photography exhibit, an exhibit on the history of the U.S. Forest Service, a children's interactive play area, and an interpretive exhibit featuring Native American perspectives of Lewis and Clark.

Figure 1
The front entrance to High Desert Museum funnels visitors through a central admission desk where volunteers help orient them to the exhibits and programs.

The museum building is augmented by a quarter-mile outdoor interpretive trail, which leads visitors through a series of outdoor exhibits. For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to describe all of HDM's outdoor exhibits, but it is important to list the largest and most significant exhibits in order to provide an overall vision of the museum: Outdoor exhibits include wildlife habitats, a 19th century steam-powered sawmill, a pioneer homestead, and a traditional Plains Indian encampment (see Appendix A) (High Desert Museum, 2006). Current live programs include wildlife interpretive talks, the new and growing living history program, and programs contracted from outside of the

museum to provide entertainment and education such as live music performances, blacksmithing demonstrations, and wine tasting (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2
Living history volunteer John Mahoney talks with visitors about the significance of stagecoaches to the history of the High Desert region.

Figure 3
The museum contracts professional blacksmiths several times each year to demonstrate 19th century blacksmithing techniques for visitors.

High Desert Museum has forty full time staff, nine part time and seasonal staff, and over one hundred volunteers. Positions range from wildlife experts and curatorial staff to graphic designers and education specialists. The museum operates with a $4.2 million annual budget and is planning for continued growth over the next ten to twenty years. The strategic plan, called *New Horizon*, includes additional wildlife habitats, outdoor classrooms, an amphitheater, living history performances, a logging camp, and increased visitor services (see Appendix B) (Studio Hanson/Roberts; AldrichPears Associates; Bufo Inc.; Thomas Hacker Architects, 2005). This study describes one component of the plan: the process of developing and implementing museum theater for the *Spirit of the West* exhibit.

Museum Theater in the Spirit of the West *Exhibit*

Museum theater will be implemented throughout the museum, incorporating a variety of topics and contexts from poisonous snakes to discussions about land use, but this study focuses on the museum theater developed for the *Spirit of the West*, a history exhibit. Mounted in 1990, *Spirit of the West* is a series of eleven life-size displays depicting Western expansion in the High Desert (see Figures 4 and 5). The exhibit scenes wind through one wing of the museum's main building and chronicle the different people and time periods that had an impact on the region. Each exhibit is complete with sounds and artifacts that give visitors the feeling that they are stepping into that particular place and time.

Figure 4
The first scene in *Spirit of the West*, a 1790 Paiute encampment depicts Native American life in parts of the High Desert prior to Euro-American expansion into the region.

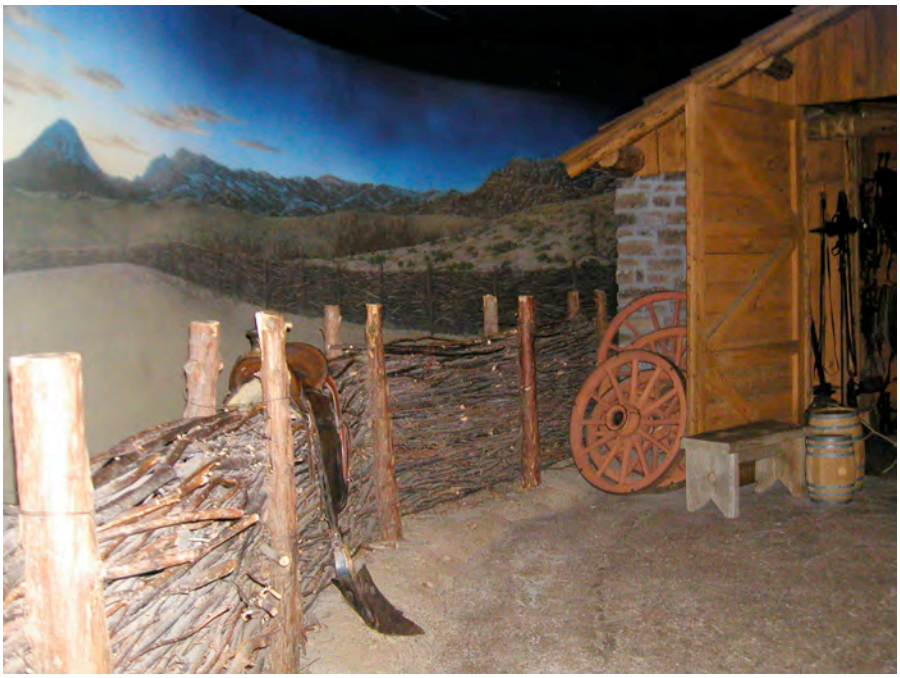

Figure 5
The final diorama in *Spirit of the West*, a buckaroo ranch in 1900, illustrates the importance of ranching and the influence of Hispanic and Latino culture in the High Desert.

The nine displays are in chronological order and include: A 1790 Native American Paiute encampment; an 1826 fur traders' camp and fort; an emigrant family whose wagon has broken down along the Applegate Trail in 1853; surveyors and explorers mapping the land circa 1853; a hard rock mine in 1859; an 1877 placer miner claim; the settlement town of Silver City, Nevada, in 1885; and finally the bunkhouse, barn and corrals of a cattle ranch run by buckaroos at the turn of the 20th century. Each exhibit area is a beautifully constructed environment depicting a realistic scene. There is little text throughout the exhibit; each scene has only one panel to identify the topic and year with a few sentences describing the exhibit and interpreting artifacts.

Though visually rich, this exhibit design is problematic because it suggests a linear progression of history and implies that inhabitants depicted in each diorama existed only during the time periods in which they are represented. For example, Native Americans appear only in the first diorama and do not appear again for the rest of the exhibit. This implies that Native Peoples were either absent in later times or not significant enough to be included in the exhibits. The exhibit omits narratives about wars, reservation life, treaties, and a host of other significant aspects of the relationship between Native Americans and the white settlers who came to the region. Chinese immigrants are depicted in the Silver City diorama, but do not appear again in the following scenes. This suggests that, like Native peoples, Chinese immigrants were only a part of that particular era.

The linear format of the exhibit, while perhaps unavoidable in the logistical context of a dioramic exhibit, is limiting in terms of content and educational opportunity.

Interpretive tours of the exhibit lend some depth and complexity to the exhibit, but museum theater will further expand and redefine the message in *Spirit of the West* by allowing historical narratives to exist outside of the physical diorama that has been designated for a particular people and era. Museum theater will offer varying perspectives and provide the opportunity for museum visitors to connect with the past through a personal connection in the present (Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998). This study describes how museum theater has been developed and used for this exhibit and offers recommendations regarding the process and outcomes of the overall project.

Preliminary Research Questions

This study explores how museum theater was developed as a technique for presenting more complete and complex history in *Spirit of the West* at High Desert Museum by answering the following questions:

- What motivations and goals drove the implementation of the museum theater program?
- What processes were involved in developing museum theater for the historical exhibit *Spirit of the West*?
    - What resources, both human and financial, were necessary?
    - What was the role of historical scholarship?
    - What staff and volunteer training was needed?
    - How did staff and volunteers reflect on the experience?
- What kind of museum theater has been implemented for the exhibit? Why?
- How will the program be evaluated?
- Has museum theater enhanced *Spirit of the West*?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

History museums have not only an opportunity but also a responsibility to help narrow the gap between academic and public interpretations of history. There are numerous variables that affect a museum's ability or commitment to produce complete and complex historical narratives. This project examines museum theater as a technique for enhancing both exhibit content and visitor experience in order to make museums better interpreters of the past.

Including previously silenced historical voices, presenting controversial issues, serving visitors of all ages and backgrounds, and building visitor and membership bases are just a few of the reasons museums have included museum theater in their programming (e.g., Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1995; Kagan, 1998). A growing body of literature on the topic suggests a rising interest in how museum theater can have a positive impact on museums of all kinds. Studies of museum theater programs in a variety of interpretive institutions across the country, from zoos and aquariums to science centers and historical societies, reveal that there are as many methods for presenting drama in museums as there are museums. Nonetheless, a review of literature in the field suggests emergent patterns that can serve as standards for practice. This chapter examines these patterns to determine *why* a museum may want to launch a museum theater program, *what* that program should encompass, and *how* a museum might build the program. Throughout the analysis, special consideration is given to those programs pertaining to historical exhibits and museums.

Why Museum Theater?

Meeting Mission Goals to Educate

As with all planning in museums, initiating a museum theater program must begin with an examination of the organization's mission. Planners must consider how museum theater will help the institution meet the goals outlined in its mission. According to Ron Kagan of the Detroit Zoological Institute, missions are an effort to "affect peoples' attitudes and values" (1998, p. 6). To succeed in this effort, museums must produce quality programs that have a meaningful impact on their audience. Museum professionals agree that whatever the mission, museum theater can be incorporated to reach visitors in engaging ways (Archibald, 1998; Jones, 2001; Kagan, 1998). After considering mission goals, program planners can develop story lines and characters to meet specific museum objectives (Jones, 2001).

Perhaps the most common among museum mission goals is to educate. For history museums, this often means presenting historical objects, people, trends, and events in an engaging way that interprets the historical period being depicted. Professionals and scholars agree that museum theater is an excellent tool with which to accomplish this goal because it appeals to audiences and can tackle topics in innovative ways. Museum theater engages visitors by using such devices as drama and intrigue to elicit a variety of emotions including humor, compassion, and awe. Theater techniques also allow museums to incorporate multiple perspectives and previously unheard voices; present conflict, controversy, and complexity; and serve audiences with varying backgrounds and needs (e.g., Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1995; Maloney & Hughes, 1999).

Engaging Visitors

Compared to other typical museum programs and exhibits, museum theater is uniquely powerful in its ability to captivate visitors while integrating educational content (Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998). Bridal emphasizes the need for programs to be engaging by quoting Brown's 1964 article that argued, "Museum personnel must recognize that visitors are under no obligation or requirement to render studious attention to museum exhibits, nor even to enter your building. Consequently, it is expedient to intrigue before you instruct!" (Brown, as cited in Bridal, 2004, p. 115). Proof of museum theater's ability to capture and hold the attention of visitors can be found in the testimonials of museum professionals and quantitative visitor studies from across the country (e.g., Jones, 1995; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). George Buss of the Whitaker Center of Science and Industry launched a museum theater program to "evoke emotion for the purpose of learning" (Buss, as cited in Bridal, 2004, p. 4). At the 1998 American Association of Museum's (AAM) conference, a host of prominent museum directors including David Ellis of Boston's Museum of Science and Robert Archibald from the Missouri Historical Society made similar statements (Archibald, 1998; Ellis, 1998). Visitor studies from Baltimore's City Life Museum revealed, "95% of visitors surveyed felt the museum theater performance they saw was 'better or superior than traditional exhibits'" (Jones, 1995, p. 2). Evaluations in Richmond, Virginia, showed that 90% of museum visitors felt Museum Theater was the best part of the exhibit they attended (Jones, 1995).

Presenting "Hidden Histories," Controversy, and Complexity

Once a theatrical presentation has captured an audience's attention, it can impart new information and challenge the visitors' assumptions about important issues (Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998). In the case of history museums, theater provides an opportunity to present what Marlow of the Witte Museum calls "'hidden' history, history that is rarely taught in schools and is not often discussed" (Marlow, as cited in Bridal, 2004, p. 8). Marlow goes on to contend that performances at the Witte "prompted a change in mood and point of view, encouraging people to feel from the inside, what such historical figures as Harriet Tubman...felt and experienced and why they held such strong convictions that they would risk – and give – their lives for the cause of freedom" (Marlow, as cited in Bridal, 2004, p. 8).[4] The multiple perspectives offered by the inclusion of often traditionally marginalized voices from history, is among the most valuable features of theater in museums. While today's historians study these "hidden" narratives, the issues they illuminate in scholarly publications are often ignored or misunderstood by museums and other interpretive organizations, a phenomenon which contributes to the gap between public and academic interpretations of history. Museum theater offers an opportunity to narrow that gap, not only through the telling of "hidden" histories and the incorporation of multiple perspectives, but also through the presentation of conflict, controversy, and complexity.

Museum professionals and scholars contend that performances are an excellent method for presenting material which may be difficult for some visitors to grasp through

[4] Harriet Tubman freed herself from slavery in the 1840s and helped hundreds of other slaves escape to the free North through an association of supporters known as the Underground Railroad.

other media, not only in the intellectual sense of understanding, but also in the emotional and psychological challenges some issues present (e.g., Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Bridal (2004) dedicates an entire chapter to the topic of difficult material in her how-to manual of museum theater. In the chapter "How Theater has been Used to Present Difficult Issues," Bridal discusses museum theater productions, which have confronted issues such as slavery, genetic diseases, population growth, and genocide, among others (2004, p. 131). Bridal (2004) and others in the field agree that museum employees often underestimate visitors' ability and desire to be challenged in the museum setting (e.g. Ellis, 1998; Jones, 1995; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). With proper planning, theater can present controversy, conflict, and complexity in history in a non-threatening and engaging manner.

Accessibility

Museum theater can also reach more visitors in a greater variety of ways than standard museum exhibits. Through outreach programs and itinerant performances, theater is more accessible than most any other presentation technique because it can engage several senses (Ellis, 1998; Hughes, 1998; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Ellis writes that museum theater "permits the institution to reach out to people who may be disabled in some way or another - for example those who are blind - perhaps some who are in wheelchairs – and it...serves people with different learning abilities" (1998, p. 3).

Museum theater's ability to reach more people, draw them in with engaging performance styles, and offer enhanced understanding of museum content has made theater programs a fast-growing practice in museums of all kinds. Research suggests

that in addition to serving the institution's mission, museum theater can enhance a museum's financial standing (Kagan, 1998). Over a five year period at the Detroit Zoological Institute, theater helped increase annual visitors from 800,000 to 1.4 million and boosted membership from 17,000 to 51,000 (Kagan, 1998). When done well, museum theater can help develop larger and better-informed audiences who are increasingly engaged in the topics museums address.

What is Good Museum Theater?

For history museums, literature suggests two main components essential to successful museum theater: 1.) Accurate, well-documented content and, 2.) Skilled dramatic performance (e.g., Bridal, 2004; Maloney & Hughes, 1999; Jones, 2001).

Content and Research

Building content for historical dramas requires diligent research and documentation. While characters developed for performances may be either real historical figures or composite characters, they must be conceived from factual experiences and environments (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Research enables characters to present details about their daily lives as well as general trends of the era they are depicting. Conner and Fortescue have declared the following "Golden Rule" of museum theater: "never make up facts and never pretend to know something you don't know" (as cited in Maloney & Hughes, 1999, p. 3). The Astors' Beechwood Mansion-Victorian Living History Museum in Newport, Rhode Island, has instituted a training program to prepare living history actors with the historical facts and perspective needed to create and portray characters of the time period (Maloney & Hughs, 1999). The museum

accomplishes this through a training program which teaches actors not only history, but also how to teach themselves about history through independent research. Actors participate in 21 days of "intense" historical training covering the Astor Family, the history of Newport, and the United States (Beck, as cited in Maloney & Hughes, 1999, p. 22). The museum also requires actors to attend sessions to ensure their language, dress, and manners are appropriate to the time period being interpreted. Meanwhile, actors must memorize a scripted performance in the role of an actual historical figure from the aristocratic class and create their own domestic servant character through independent research. In an article written for the American Association of Museums' collection of museum theater case studies, the executive director of The Astors' Beechwood Mansion wrote that the museum "is the success it is because of the use of very talented, well-trained actors" (Beck, 1999, 27). Well-researched, accurate content in the hands of skilled performers is the building block for good interpretive performances.

Also essential to the realistic recreation of a historic time is the inclusion of all peoples of the appropriate ages, ethnic groups, and nationalities of the period. Even the suitable balance of men and women is important to a historically accurate presentation (Maloney & Hughes, p. 3). For example, a production interpreting the lives of fur trappers in the American West could not cast many actors over the age of 50 because trappers of that age would have been extremely rare. Similarly, a performance about life in early Western settlement towns could not exclude Native Americans because Native peoples were a noteworthy population of the time. A 1997 anthropological study addressed problems of demographic inclusion at America's premiere living history

museum, Colonial Williamsburg (Handler & Gable). Authors of the study argued that prior to 1970 Colonial Williamsburg was a "version of the American story focused too narrowly on 'great men' and elites, and ignored the works and lives of the vast majority of the American population...and social conflict, thereby cleansing American history of oppression, exploitation, injustice, and struggle" (Handler & Gable, 1997, p. 4). Following the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, Americans were keenly aware of these precise conflicts in America. Low attendance at Colonial Williamsburg suggested that the public was no longer willing to accept this kind of historical interpretation (Handler & Gable, 1997). In response to shifting American expectations, the museum made changes in their interpretive programs in order to tell a different, more inclusive social history. Two of the most significant new topics include the discussion of class differences and the African American story in Colonial Williamsburg. In order to point out class divisions, interpretive guides tell visitors that it is important to remember that 90% of the people living in Colonial Williamsburg would have been living in one-room shacks with dirt floors, not the type of houses portrayed throughout the museum. To include the history of the African American experience, the museum also now offers a tour called "The Other Half," which focuses on how the legal code was used to "dominate and disempower" blacks in Colonial Williamsburg[5] (Handler & Gable, 1997, p. 85). This study is a reminder of the importance of demographic inclusion and balance in interpreting historical periods.

[5] The authors of the study go on to point out that "The Other Half" tour is only given outside because the stories are not documented so therefore cannot be connected to actual people (whites) nor to the reproduced houses with which they are associated. The authors find this to be a fundamental flaw in the interpretive policy at Colonial Williamsburg (Handler & Gable, 1997).

Dramatic Presentation

The second essential component to a successful performance is a skilled dramatic presentation. This is best accomplished by involving theater professionals (e.g., Archibald, 1998; Bridal, 2004; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Beck argues, and other studies agree, that it is more efficient to train actors in history than to train historians in acting (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Using theater professionals and theater techniques brings depth to characters and creates a more personalized and authentic production (Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1995; Maloney & Hughes, 1999).

How can Museum Theater be Effectively Developed?

Theater Professionals

The combination of historical research and professional theater practice creates museum theater performances that are personalized, meaningful, and engaging. Success relies on the solid infrastructure of the program, the system that enables a museum theater program to produce its performances. The most important building blocks of the infrastructure are the people involved. While museum staff may be enthusiastic about the program, most do not have professional theater training. Therefore, launching a museum theater program often includes hiring or collaborating with theater professionals. Experts assert that this does not mean productions must be expensive, but it does mean that theater professionals must be included in the development, performance, and evaluation of any production (e.g., Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998, Jones, 1995). Depending on the topic and the strengths and abilities of museum staff and volunteers, theater professionals may be incorporated as writers, directors, actors, costume designers, or

drama coaches (Ellis, 1998; Jones, 2001; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Professionals help ensure that pieces are dramatically presented with well-developed characters. In addition to affecting the performance value of a piece, theater professionals may also enhance the educational value by incorporating theater techniques that make a presentation more engaging.

Again, the training program at The Astors' Beechwood Mansion-Victorian Living History Museum provides a useful example of a training series. Actors there must use a theater technique called "what if" to learn more about the character they play (Beck, 1999, p. 25). This preparation method requires actors to "recreate at least three moments from the daily routine" of the people they are portraying which answer the question, "What if I did that?" One example would be an actor's interpretation of how he or she might go to the beach. This might involve donning a Victorian-style bathing suit and preparing items to carry along. When preparing for the role of a domestic servant, an actor might actually perform the daily chores of the servant, difficult or unpleasant as they might be (Beck, 1999). The experience allows actors to more fully imagine the characters they are depicting and create "vivid memories" of that character's daily life which can then be relayed to visitors with convincing detail (Beck, 1999, p. 26). Theater professionals have expertise in preparing actors, designing spaces, managing time, and developing presentations, areas of expertise which museum staff members most likely lack.

Studies show that collaborative relationships are among the most successful methods for engaging theater professionals in a museum program (Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998; Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Experts suggest contacting theater departments in

high schools and colleges as well as local theater groups. After running advertisements in local newspapers and museum publications for a museum theater coordinator, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania approached the theater department at the local college and was immediately successful in recruiting a suitable individual for the position (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). That program has since grown to offer acting internships to Master of Fine Arts candidates, a demonstration of its increasing professionalism (Maloney & Hughes, 1999).

The Missouri Historical Society began theater productions by hiring the local theater troupe Hystorionics. Hystorionics scripted, costumed, and performed the pieces with such astounding success that the company moved into the Historical Society to become the "theater in residence" (Bridal, 2004; Archibald, 1998). Several additional examples including the Victorian Living History Museum and the Minnesota History Center have advanced from contracting actors to employing an entire theater company (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Theater professionals are an essential component to building a strong infrastructure that can grow with the program.

Space

While theater professionals work to perfect performance techniques, and as historical research is conducted to ensure the appropriateness of a performance's content, museum staff members must consider how the program will fit into the existing and future physical spaces of the museum. Professional recommendations for launching a museum theater program argue that performance space for a beginning program can be designated in a variety of existing museum spaces. Exhibits are natural theater sets

because they incorporate the objects and backdrop of the topic. Other spaces throughout a facility can also make excellent performance areas as long as they provide the audience with a suitable environment for watching and listening to the performance. This may mean finding space away from other activities or heavily trafficked areas (Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1995). Although improvised spaces can be found in any facility, literature in the field suggests that as a museum theater program expands, space must be dedicated to comfortably accommodate audiences (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). Performance space should be considered during exhibit planning and construction. With forethought, it is possible to include "stages" in many exhibit areas (Maloney & Hughes, 1999). With appropriate space and skilled individuals, museum theater programs have the basic infrastructure needed to operate and even expand with success.

Conclusion

Current scholarship reveals that museum theater can further the mission of almost any kind of museum, but it is especially well suited to history museums. With designated goals, museum theater that is built on a solid infrastructure, accurate content, and skilled performers can help museums enhance visitors' experiences, expand the educational potential of exhibits, increase a museum attendance, and perhaps even help create historical consciousness among museum visitors.

Chapter 3: Data Collection

Introduction

This study describes the process by which museum theater has been developed and implemented at High Desert Museum (HDM) in Bend, Oregon. The evidence collected for this project will provide a set of valuable "lessons learned" to be considered by other museums interested in launching a museum theater program. Additionally, research data may contribute to the cumulative understanding of historical interpretation and the ways in which history is taught and learned. In this chapter, I will briefly describe the perspective and process by which the data were gathered and analyzed. The following provides a discussion of case study methodology, an analysis of my perspective as the researcher, and an outline of the methods and sources of data collection.

Case Study Methodology

After reviewing literature related to qualitative research methodologies, I determined case study to be the best methodology for investigating and presenting research on the development and implementation of a museum theater program. Case study research allowed me to select my research site without random sampling, permitted flexibility and variety in data sources, and established a compelling presentation format.

Site Selection

One of the most important determinants in investigating and presenting this topic as a case study was the ability to select the research site that best fit my research interests. Several studies investigating interpretative techniques, such as museum theater, suggested that intimate knowledge of an organization was needed to explore the

development of a program within that organization (e.g. Hayashi, 2003; Hobbs, 2001; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). This knowledge may include sensitive or private information such as the wishes of a donor, personal biases of leaders and stakeholders, and details about the institution's governing structure. For example, Hobbs's 2004 study of the Thomas Worthington House reveals the impact of the curator's personal preferences which are apparent in the interpretations of the museum's historical exhibits. Hobbs describes how the curator's upbringing and education affected the exhibit to make his point. Mullen refers to this as the "well-developed characters" and "believable narrative" that are inherent in case study writing (2005, p. 43).

This kind of information forms the detailed description and historical context that is fundamental in qualitative study. "Insider knowledge" is most often generated by the rapport that comes from careful site selection (Mullen, 2005; Yin, 2003). Nonrandom sampling permits the researcher to anticipate his or her ability to learn intimate details about people and events needed to formulate the detailed descriptions necessary for a case study (Hayashi, 2003; Rutherford & Shay, 2004; Yin, 2004).

I selected High Desert Museum as the site for this study after working as a graduate intern in HDM's Audience Development Department. While there, I learned that the museum was planning to launch a museum theater program that would fit my research interests. My work at the organization allowed me to garner support and interest in the study. I was therefore able to conclude that museum staff and volunteers would be cooperative participants in the study.

Dual Roles in Research

Case study research also allows the researcher to act as both scholar and practitioner (Mullen, 2005; Yin, 2003). Several history museum and heritage site researchers have exchanged their ideas and expertise with those they are studying, blending theory with practice (e.g. Hayashi, 2003; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). For example, Rutherford and Shay's (2004) roles as both historians and museum professionals at Campbell House allowed them broad access to data while also affecting the organization directly. This combined role helps the researcher understand the site from multiple perspectives, contributes to her depth of knowledge, and enhances the museum staff's expertise.

For the purposes of this study, my dual roles of scholar and practitioner encouraged the open exchange of ideas between participants in the study and myself. I was able to share information with staff and volunteers as well as gather data from them to further my research. This exchange helped the organization better coordinate the museum theater program. (Hayashi, 2003; Hobbs, 2001; Mullen, 2005).

Process Flexibility and Multiple Sources

Throughout the study I was able gather information on a flexible schedule and employ a variety of sources (Yin, 2003). Questions relevant to the theoretical framework evolved and emerged throughout the study, an important aspect in qualitative research (Hays, 2004; Mullen, 2005; Yin, 2003). The multiple methods used to collect data (interviews, observation, and document analysis) created a natural triangulation of methods and evidence (e.g. Hayashi, 2003; Hobbs, 2001; Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach,

2004). These methods were the most likely to produce relevant data as well as reveal patterns over time.

Research Findings and Presentation

The type of information that case study research produces is consistent with the needs of a study focusing on museum theater as a technique for interpreting historical events. Case studies often yield data in the form of recommendations or "lessons learned." They produce evidence that one may not be able to generalize but which one can use as a suggestion of patterns across the topic area (Hays, 2004; Hobbs, 2001). Data yielded through case study research may be used later in cross-case analysis and as support for other similar studies. (Hays, 2003; Yin, 2003). For history museums, this is precisely the kind of data that is needed to generate greater understanding of the benefits and challenges of developing and implementing museum theater for historical exhibits.

Case studies are usually presented in a persuasive narrative format that mixes quotes from conversations, interviews, and documents with observations and factual information (e.g. Hobbs, 2001; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). This presentation and combination of sources and perspectives lends reliability to the study and provides the context necessary to the analysis of the museum theater program.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were gathered through a review of relevant literature, in-person interviews, analysis of documents provided by High Desert Museum, and observation.

Literature Review and Coding

The review of literature began in March 2005 with preliminary research on interpretation at historical museums. As stated above, this study was initiated with the assumption that historical museums do not always provide the most comprehensive and inclusive descriptions of history. Thus, I began to accumulate literature that explores this idea through a series of keyword searches in the University of Oregon online library catalogue. Combinations of the following keywords were used to gather books and journal articles: museum, history, interpretation, historical narratives, and historical exhibits.

During my summer 2005 internship at High Desert Museum, I learned that the museum planned to launch a museum theater program the following spring in order to better engage visitors in the history of the High Desert region. I determined that this program could serve as a case study. I could examine a method used to present the more complete and complex historical narratives discussed in current literature. During the summer and fall of 2005, I refined my keyword literature search to include museum theater, living history, and American West. In addition to the online library search, I also used the same keywords to locate resources through the online search engine Google Scholar as well as the online book vendor Amazon.

Searches for relevant literature uncovered an abundance of information which was coded for the following themes: 1.) History is complex and controversial; 2.) The public learns about history from museums; 3.) Museums have a responsibility to present historical narratives that include multiple perspectives; 4.) Museum theater can enhance

historical exhibits; and 5.) Museum theater helps people learn about history. Within the subtopic of museum theater, I further coded literature for methods of program development including training, performance standards, and space.

Interviews and Observation

These categories were also used to code data gathered through interviews and observation. Interviews and observation were planned and carried out in compliance with University of Oregon Office of Human Subjects, the entity at the University of Oregon that ensures compliance with federal policies regarding Institutional Review Boards (see Appendixes C – H). Interviews were conducted at High Desert Museum with individuals involved in the planning and implementation of the museum theater program, including Bill Armstrong, Living History Interpreter; Larry Berrin, Interpretive Manager; Sharon Goodmonson, Director of Audience Development; and Muriel Carbiener, Living History Volunteer. Each interview was audio recorded, and the data gathered were coded for the categories listed above.

In addition to interviews, I observed a training session for living history volunteers led by Bill Armstrong and living history performances by volunteers Gary Doleval and Mike Ford. I audio recorded the training session and took notes and photographed the living history performances. The evidence collected was coded according to the aforementioned themes.

Methodological Justification

I assume history, that is, the interpretation of the past, to be socially constructed. I believe the presentation of history has long been determined by the dominant culture,

which has led to the unequal representation of voices and stories. In this study I offer evidence that historical museums do not always provide balanced versions of history that are informed by current scholarship. Although a comprehensive measure of the benefits of museum theater for High Desert Museum, its volunteers, staff, and visitors or of museum theater's ability to ensure complex historical narrative is beyond the scope of this research study, I believe that my study can provide a beginning inquiry upon which future researchers can build.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Motivation

The museum theater program at High Desert Museum (HDM) was developed as part of an overall cultural interpretive strategic plan for 2006-2011, designed to create specific "cognitive and affective experiences" for visitors (see Appendix H). This section first describes the organizational and contextual background that led HDM to include museum theater as part of long-range museum goals and strategies. It then outlines HDM's three motivations for the establishment of museum theater: 1.) Increase museum attendance; 2.) Present museum content in a more engaging manner; and 3.) Create learning experiences that support the museum's mission and include the interpretation of traditionally under-represented groups (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April, 7, 2006).

Background: Organizational Change and Focus on the Visitor

During the mid-1990s, the number of annual visitors to High Desert Museum peaked at 175,000. However, by 2004, museum attendance had significantly decreased, attracting only 125,000 annually (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, May 31, 2006). Museum staff point to a number of internal and external factors that contributed to the diminished audience, including the post-September 11th nationwide decrease in travel and tourism. A flawed organizational structure hastened the decline, too (Flowers, 2006). Continued low attendance contributed to mounting financial difficulty and in 2004 resulted in the laying-off of seventeen staff members and a restructuring of museum departments and positions (Flowers, 2006).

In an attempt to increase museum attendance and streamline museum administration, HDM created a new department, Audience Development, and issued a new master plan, *New Horizon*. Both are designed to focus first on the needs of visitors. The Director of Audience Development, Sharon Goodmonson, oversees six departments: Interpretation, Guest Services, Visitor Programming, Communications and Promotions, Wildlife Programs, and Graphic Design. Goodmonson is charged with ensuring that these departments "put the visitor first in all decisions," in order to increase museum attendance (personal communication, April 7, 2006). The new long-range plan, *New Horizon*, was also conceived "with the visitor experience at its core" (Big Changes, 2005, p. 1). The plan was created by museum staff and outside experts in zoo design, landscape architecture, and visitor behavior who combined their expertise with information from market research. *New Horizon* is expected to "guide exhibit development and on-site programming for the next ten to twenty years" by fulfilling two commitments to visitors: 1.) "Every visit will be a new experience," and 2.) "Every visitor will become a steward of the region's natural resources and cultural heritage" (Big Changes, 2005, p. 1). The Audience Development Department and *New Horizon* consider visitor needs in order to increase attendance and accomplish the museum's mission.

Theater as a Method for Accomplishing Museum Goals

Museum theater will play a prominent role in accomplishing the goals set out by *New Horizon* and the Audience Development department. A recent survey supported museum plans to employ museum theater to increase attendance, specifically among 45-

64 year olds and return visitors. Survey results revealed that of the 284 Central Oregonians surveyed, 50% reported that they would be most likely to attend the museum to encounter "costumed living history characters" (Bend Focus, 2006). This percentage tied with the categories "music events" and "rotating art exhibits" for the second highest ranking. Only "animal exhibits" surpassed the "living history characters" category as the top museum attraction. Survey findings supported museum plans to make theater a significant component of the interpretive program.

Also supporting the launch of museum theater is the appeal of theater to a wide range of people. Results from the same survey revealed that the 45 to 64 year-old age demographic was the most under-served of museum audiences. Goodmonson and museum staff members were surprised at this result, since previous surveys found the most under-served audience to be individuals under 45 years old, particularly families with children. According to Goodmonson, museum theater, and living history specifically, is expected to draw visitors from both age groups, especially history buffs 45 to 64 years old. Larry Berrin, Interpretive Programs Manager, agrees, observing that with museum theater, "no matter what age, what background, you will find something that suits your needs" (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Unlike fixed exhibits, theater provides a new experience each time visitors attend the museum. Berrin explains that whether the visitor is a history buff or a 10-year-old child, museum theater provides a "holistic experience that is less static" than traditional museum exhibits. He argues that the museum's exhibits provide the facts, but museum theater provides the specific "flavor" of the time period. He claims that for visitors who

experience museum theater, "every visit would be different" (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006). During one museum outing, visitors may encounter a family of homesteaders in 1880, while another visit might include a discussion with a fur trapper in 1825, and still another might include a meeting with a stranded wagon train in 1853. Museum employees anticipate that with appropriate program scheduling, museum theater can provide a new experience for return visitors every time they come, thereby increasing overall museum attendance (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006; S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006).

In addition to increasing museum visitation from target audience age groups and return visitors, museum staff members expect that the method and content of museum theater presentations will help deliver themes central to the museum's mission. Goodmonson declares that museum theater, specifically living history, is "an incredibly potent way to connect the visitor to history." She explains, "Living history is extremely important in us [HDM] getting the message across about stewardship, the connection to the High Desert, the connection to the past, the connection to the present, and the connection in the future" (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). Goodmonson expects that theatrical performances, whether scripted plays, informal encounters with visitors, or improvised meetings among characters, will make visitors more receptive to the particular messages and themes in the museum (personal communication, April 7, 2006).

A greater focus on the historical narratives of people who have been traditionally under-represented in the High Desert is among the themes the museum hopes to include

in museum theater (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). Goodmonson notes that by including the stories of Hispanics, Native Peoples, and women in theater performances, the museum would also draw visitors from these groups (personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Resources and Research

Before current plans were initiated, High Desert Museum had never had an official museum theater program (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2005). Therefore, the program's development process included an assessment of internal resources, both human and financial, as well as research at institutions that had museum theater programs from which HDM hoped to learn. Although many departments and staff at the museum were involved in launching the theater program, three full-time staff members were primarily responsible for the program's design and implementation. This section describes these individuals' specific areas of expertise and philosophies, how they became involved in the program, and how they have structured it for visitor consumption.

Program Leadership

When Goodmonson took the post of Director of Audience Development in February 2005, museum theater at HDM was in its beginning stages. A couple of volunteers had developed first person living history characters and occasionally performed in museum exhibit spaces, but there was not a systemized program (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2005). The volunteers had no official standards, training, or leadership from an expert in the topic. Goodmonson believes that her background in performance and her connections to the local theater community were

leading factors in her appointment as Director of Audience Development. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in theater and founded and managed the Central Oregon Opera company, Obsidian Opera (Big Changes, 2005). Goodmonson also holds a Master of Arts in Public Health, contributing to her expertise in program development and evaluation (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2005).

In September 2005, Goodmonson and other senior HDM staff members formed a committee to hire a new Interpretive Programs Manager, a recently vacated position, and Interpreter, an entirely new position. The Interpretive Programs Manager would oversee the Interpreter and report directly to Goodmonson. For the Interpretive Programs Manager position, the committee sought a specialist in natural *or* cultural history interpretation with strong management skills. According to Goodmonson, the position could have been filled by either a natural or cultural history interpreter because which ever content area remained unfilled would determine the job description for the Interpreter (personal communication, S. Goodmonson, April 7, 2006). The committee hired L. Berrin, a wildlife and natural history interpreter with several years of experience successfully managing interpretive programs, as Interpretive Programs Manager. Berrin is responsible for planning and presenting natural history programs, developing training for staff and volunteer natural history interpreters, and managing the Interpretive Programs Department. He has some background in living history presentations, and he holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources. His experience includes work as a naturalist in the National Parks Service, National Audubon Society, and the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. He is aware of the difference in content between

natural and cultural or social history, but he describes his specialty more broadly as "the art of interpretation" (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006). Berrin defines this skill as the ability to develop and give "programs and presentations that speak to the common person about complex issues" (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006). In other words, while interpreters will develop expertise in different topics, the skills needed to present topics to the public in institutions such as museums are fundamentally the same, regardless of the topic. Since Berrin's expertise was in natural history and interpretation, the museum next sought to hire an Interpreter who specialized in living history.

Berrin became part of the hiring committee that advertised for a Living History Interpreter who would be responsible for playing living history characters as well as training volunteers to give living history presentations (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). The committee decided to hire a living history interpreter because its members recognized that although Berrin could coordinate scripted museum theater performances by hiring outside actors, he would need a full-time living history interpreter who possessed a greater understanding of the museum's mission, strategies, and resources (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). Goodmonson says, "It's not that we [museum staff] are looking at living history as necessarily being more important than museum theater...[but] as completely separate. Both are different and evocative ways to bring the [museum's] messages to people" (personal communication, April 7, 2006). Bill Armstrong was hired as Interpreter

because his experience in Northwest living history had prepared him to begin portraying living history characters at the museum immediately.

Armstrong holds a Bachelor of Arts in history and has had over fifteen years of experience developing and playing characters from Northwest history and training others to do the same. His work at Fort Vancouver helped him develop the character of William Josiah Tucker, a 35-year-old hunter and trapper who lived in 1838. Armstrong uses the character to teach visitors about the close relationship people once had to the land and the kinds of opportunities and challenges presented by that relationship (personal communication, March 23, 2006). Armstrong defines his specialty as "living environmental theater," explaining that this style of historical presentation focuses on the "stories of common people," such as a homesteader or miner, and mixes historical fact with "attitudes and feelings" that help define a time, place, or people in history. These presentations are not scripted, and they often take place in replicated environments and include visitor participation. Like Goodmonson, Armstrong differentiates this kind of presentation from more formalized scripted museum theater performances that might include notable historical characters of the region such as William Clark or Marcus Whitman and be staged in an auditorium or similar environment. Armstrong considers visitor participation to be a leading factor in the ability of living environmental theater to engage and educate an audience. For example, he is planning an 1880 homestead environment in which visitors will be invited to "feed chickens, hoe the garden... hear about what local Native Americans are like, what the homesteader does to make money... or what it's like to be cut off from family..." (B. Armstrong, personal communication,

March 23, 2006). Armstrong argues, "It's not just the history and data, it's the *experience* in history that is worthy of learning from" (personal communication, March 23, 2006). Armstrong considers the *Spirit of the West* exhibit to be an excellent set for a living history environment.

Armstrong, Berrin, and Goodmonson agree that their collective backgrounds, skills, and experience make them a strong and well-balanced team that can fulfill specific department goals and serve the museum's broad, long-term mission (personal communication, March 23 and April 7, 2006). As Interpretive Program Manager, Berrin manages both natural and cultural history programs but seeks Armstrong's expertise in matters related to living history. Berrin and Armstrong meet twice weekly to discuss future planning and communicate about decisions made in museum-wide staff meetings that Armstrong does not attend (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Research

To prepare for HDM's program launch, Berrin and other senior staff members traveled to some of the nation's largest most renowned living history museums to research approaches to museum theater. Berrin and others visited Sturbridge Village and Plimouth Plantation in Massachusetts, Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, and Conner Prairie in Indiana. HDM staff members learned that all of these museums employ full-time actors to portray living history characters. Program coordinators at each museum discussed the strategies and challenges of producing living history and museum theater. At Sturbridge Village, project leaders explained that declining attendance had forced the museum to let go forty of its sixty full-time living history actors. Staff at the other sites

agreed that employing actors throughout the museum was a costly expense that HDM should avoid. Research confirmed what Goodmonson and other senior HDM staff suspected: the museum theater and living history programs would need trained volunteers to succeed.

Staff and Volunteers on the Frontlines

As staff Interpreter, Armstrong will give several daily performances of living history and museum theater. A small stage has been built in a classroom in the museum's main building where Armstrong will present scripted monologue performances. He will also appear in the Fur Trapper diorama in *Spirit of the West*, and at the outdoor homestead exhibit. Additionally, the museum has hired one full-time seasonal staff interpreter and will rely on two part-time staff interpreters and a group of 23 volunteers to perform museum theater and present living history characters. The full-time seasonal interpreter, a 23-year-old white male, will work from May through September, playing characters such as an Oregon Trail guide, a miner and a homesteader. The two part-time interpreters, a 28-year-old white male and 29-year-old white female, work as School Specialists during the academic year but can part of their time to playing living history characters during the summer months (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). While these four paid individuals ensure that living history and museum theater performances will take place daily, the volunteers are essential to creating an overall environment where visitors can encounter several performances during one museum visit (L. Berrin, personal communication, April 7, 2006). The 23 volunteers who have attended training workshops are all white, predominantly female, and range in age from

the mid-forties through the mid-seventies. Among the characters this group portrays are an 1885 assayer, a mother traveling the Applegate Trail in 1852, and a stagecoach driver from 1885. These and other characters and the training process will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Budget

A $25,000 grant from the Bend Foundation was awarded to the museum for period clothing and props, the seasonal interpreter, and volunteer training materials such as reference books and copies. Salaries of permanent staff, including the two part-time interpreters, Goodmonson, Berrin, and Armstrong come from the museum's operating budget.

Training and Development

Armstrong was charged with developing a training program that would prepare volunteers to present living history characters and museum theater performances throughout the museum. Goodmonson assigned Armstrong the specific task of "bringing volunteers up to the standard that [the museum] envisioned for living history performers" (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Environments and Topics

The training program began by determining which exhibits in the museum could be used as sets for presentations, a strategy called "peopling environments." The *Spirit of the West* exhibit and *Robbins Homestead* were identified as the richest and most complete environments to which dramatic presentations could be added (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). The series of 11 walk-through dioramas in

Spirit of the West provided ready stage sets for the history of Western expansion into the High Desert.

Armstrong then began to recruit volunteers. As he got to know their interests and personalities, he decided that the program would be most successful if he trained volunteers to develop living history characters before learning scripted roles for more formal theatrical presentations. From his years of working with volunteers, Armstrong knew that beginning volunteers would function best in environments where they would encounter and interact with museum visitors (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006).

Training Workshops

Volunteers were trained as living history interpreters in a six-part workshop that covered museum expectations, basic interpretation techniques, research methods, presentation styles, and protocol. Armstrong led the trainings and was careful to create a safe and supportive learning environment that would energize and encourage volunteers to participate. Mindful of the phrase, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar," Armstrong describes the workshops as, "a circle of friends and mentors," rather than a place where volunteers feel they are on the spot to perform (personal communication, March 23, 2006). This philosophy is augmented by Armstrong's conviction that volunteers must be able to choose their own characters. Unlike paid staff members to whom Armstrong could assign roles and related tasks, volunteers must be self-motivated to donate time and energy. Armstrong declares, "Saddle them with their interests!" He believes that this is the most important principle in training a volunteer

force for living history (personal communication, March 23, 2006). With a supportive environment and a fundamental interest in the topic, volunteers will be ready to take on the demanding task of researching and developing a character. Armstrong expects volunteers to have problems and make mistakes, but he anticipates that with a support system and proper training, volunteers will be inspired to continue to improve (personal communication, March 23, 2006).

The six training workshops met over the course of three months for approximately two hours each session. The intent was to prepare volunteers to perform living history characters by Memorial Day weekend, the museum's official kickoff of the busy summer season. Throughout the workshop series, Armstrong presented information, asked volunteers to work together in group exercises as well as to perform individual tasks, and included time and opportunities for participants to express concerns, share ideas, and give feedback. Each workshop began with the opportunity for participants to ask Armstrong questions. This structure helped keep participants involved and created the open communication necessary to the kind of environment Armstrong hoped to develop. The following section addresses the content of the workshops.

Expectations

The expectations for volunteers participating in the living history training were presented as the "prime directives" of the program. The directives stated that each participant would seek to:

1. *Engage* visitors in encounters and conversations;

2. *Encourage* visitors to participate in activities and become part of the living history;
3. *Illuminate* history though emotional and physical encounters;
4. *Evoke* opportunities for learning; and
5. *Acknowledge* different visitor needs and motives (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Armstrong also shared the "goals and assumptions of the living history program," which include basic principles for volunteers such as taking ownership in their own learning process, working together to continually improve, conducting on-going research, supporting the museum mission, enjoying the process, accepting change, and being flexible (personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Interpretation Techniques

Methods for interpretation used during training were based on standards from the National Parks Service and the National Association for Interpretation.[6] Freeman Tilden's (1957) six principles of interpretation are the foundation for interpretation at these organizations and were presented as the guidelines for living history interpreters at HDM.[7] Volunteers were asked to identify how their proposed characters would meet

[6] The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1988 to inspire, "leadership and excellence to advance heritage interpretation as a profession" (About NAI, 2005). NAI offers workshops and certification programs that are used as professional standards in the field.

[7] Tilden's (1957) six principles of interpretation are 1.) Relate to the individual; 2.) Information alone is not interpretation. "However, all interpretation includes information" (p.18) Research is essential; 3.) Interpretation is an art that requires imagination. Tell a story, don't recite an inventory; 4.) Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. The job of the interpreter is to widen and deepen the interests of the visitor; 5.) Present a whole rather than parts. Convey the essence of the place so the visitor clearly knows the significance of preserving it; 6.) Interpretation

each of the principles. Additional terms and ideas important in interpretive techniques were also discussed. To put interpretive theory into practice, Armstrong prepared twelve historical artifacts and asked each volunteer to briefly discuss one object from the perspective of his or her character. Volunteers were directed to talk about the significance of the item and its historical background. Armstrong reports that volunteers gave lively performances and were comfortable with the program and subjects (personal communication, March 23, 2006).

Research

Workshops also addressed methods for conducting historical research. Armstrong provided copies of real historical diary entries for volunteers to study. Volunteers discussed the inherent and ascribed meanings they identified in the text.[8] This exercise helped volunteers recognize the importance of primary sources and their role in interpreting historical evidence. The importance of continuous research was also stressed throughout training sessions (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). Reading lists and Web sites were distributed for each of the topic areas participants would be interpreting, the Oregon Trail, the Fur Trade, and the Spirit of the West (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Character Development and Dramatic Performance

Throughout the training sessions, volunteers continued to refine their characters and practice techniques for presenting dramatic performances. Participants completed

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for children should be fundamentally different than that presented to adults, and not a diluted version of an adult topic.

[8] Inherent meaning is meaning that is tangible. For example: The house is *brick;* the car is *yellow*; the desk is *wooden*. Ascribed meaning is meaning that is intangible. For example: The house is *strong*; the car is *ugly*; the desk is *elegant*.

character scores to help them each develop the personality and life of their characters (see Appendix I) (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006). A character score is a fact sheet about the character's life which includes name, place of birth, family history, interests, and other personal details. To prepare volunteers to complete their own character scores, Armstrong discussed the differences between two types of characters participants could choose to portray: "Mr. and Mrs. Mundane" or "Mr. and Mrs. Exceptional." "Mr. and Mrs. Mundane" were average people who spent a brief period of their lives doing something extraordinary. They "became exceptional by enduring and recounting their drama" (Armstrong, 2006). The stories of these people are best suited for creating fictitious characters (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). By contrast, "Mr. and Mrs. Exceptional" were individuals such as Kit Carson, Klondike Kate, or William Clark who are well known in history. These individuals are "vilified or revered for who they are and what they did in their extraordinary lives." Armstrong suggested volunteers portray these individuals if they were interested in performing monologues (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006).

Volunteers learned to develop their characters while improving their presentation techniques. Each created and shared a "driver's license" for his or her character. While in character, each volunteer discussed the kind of work his or her spouse did, and whether or not it was "good" work. Volunteers were encouraged to think about the cultural influences, life-changing experiences, and influential persons in their characters' lives (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006). Participants also joined in a version of the game "pass the hot potato." Armstrong began by describing a hypothetical

situation from the point of view of his character. He then passed the situation to a volunteer. The volunteer's character further developed the situation and passed it to another volunteer and so on until everyone in the group had had a turn. Participants were asked to be mindful of historical accuracy and presentation style (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006). Activities helped volunteers use their own research and remain engaged in the learning process.

To help volunteers fine-tune presentation skills, museum volunteer and speech coach Dr. Marian Woodall offered techniques for warming up the voice, facial muscles, body, and brain before a presentation.[9] The group practiced tongue twisters and, learned exercises used by professional actors and speakers (Marion Woodall, personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Volunteers also learned methods for interacting with visitors. Armstrong explained that while in character, interpreters should never "begin at the beginning" (personal communication, April 12, 2006). They should "fight the urge" to begin by recounting their character's vital statistics, incidentals that are not particularly interesting. "No one ever introduces themselves and recounts their personal character score," Armstrong pointed out (personal communication, April 12, 2006). Instead, living history volunteers can effectively communicate who they are and why their story is important by focusing on what they are doing at the moment and inviting visitors to participate in the scene, be it washing clothes, gathering chickens, or fanning a fire. Living history is an attempt to suspend visitors' disbelief, so volunteers need to be as "real" as possible when

[9] Dr. Woodall is a prominent voice and speech coach who has published eight books on effective communication and speech. For examples, see *Presentations That Get Results*, 1997, Professional Business Communications.

interacting with them (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006). Workshops offered additional techniques for working with visitors, such as always inviting parents to participate with children or commenting positively on visitors' modern attire (Armstrong, 2006).

Protocol

The workshop instructors discussed policies, procedures, and general etiquette, too (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 12, 2006). Program policy requires that while in character, volunteers wear appropriate clothing and use appropriate props for the time period they interpret. Items such as modern watches, eyeglasses, and nametags are not permitted. The museum will purchase a set of period clothing for volunteers who are ready to perform. The clothing is the property of the museum, but is tailored to fit the individual and his or her character. Armstrong stressed that he would need to approve any garment or prop purchased by volunteers for their own use (personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Regarding behavior, Armstrong pointed out that while in costume, "modern talk" with friends or visitors was inappropriate; volunteers in costume should stay in character. However, in case of an emergency situation or a hostile visitor, volunteers are told to "drop character" and get help (Armstrong, 2006).

Making the Grade

Before making presentations to the public, all volunteers are asked to perform in front of Armstrong and a panel of other volunteer interpreters. Panelists are long-time volunteers who assisted Armstrong with the training workshops and conducted extensive

research on the historical periods which volunteers intended to interpret (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). Volunteers who do not feel ready for the final audition are encouraged to seek more guidance, as auditions will be ongoing. Armstrong stressed that it was impossible to "fail" the training program. Volunteers might be asked to practice and re-audition, but no participants will be turned away. Volunteers who successfully audition are asked to sign up for living history shifts (B. Armstrong, personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Results and Reflections

Armstrong is pleased with the results of the workshops, reflecting that the volunteers are talented individuals who have been easy to train. He also believes that they had fun and enjoyed the overall process (personal communication, March 23, 2006). At least one participant agrees, declaring the workshops to be "absolutely awesome!" (M. Carbiener, personal communication, April 12, 2006). A liaison between Armstrong and the volunteer participants, she is able to see the program from both perspectives. As a participant, she describes the workshops as "confidence-building, with gradual learning, and a supportive structure" (personal communication, April 12, 2006). Armstrong has remained available for questions, which contributes the positive environment she believes has been central to the success of the program.

The biggest challenge in developing the program thus far has been maintaining communication between the living history program and the museum at large (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006; M. Carbiener, personal communication, April 12, 2006). For example, a decision by senior museum staff to

change the interpreted date of the homestead barn from the early 1870s to the 1880s after training had begun, displeased some volunteers who had purchased clothing for the earlier period (M. Carbiener, personal communication, April 12, 2006). Last minute changes to living history program schedules have also been challenging. Interpreters perform best when their roles are well-planned and rehearsed; time crunches due to changing plans in other departments can be stressful and difficult to accommodate. Nonetheless, Armstrong considers the development process to have been highly successful.

Leadership, research, and workshop training have produced a team of volunteer living history interpreters who can perform and interact. Of the 23 volunteers ready to give performances throughout the museum, 13 have chosen the interpret dioramas in *Spirit of the West.* Figure 6 lists the characters, time periods, and environments volunteers will interpret in the exhibit.

Volunteer	Character	Date	Environment
Mackenzie Whittle	Hudson Bay Company Trader's Wife	1826	Fur Trader Fort
Muriel Carbiener	Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
June Krol	Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
Ann McGranahan	Wife/Mother	1853	Applegate Trail Wagon
Jim Horton	Assayer	1885	Silver City
Mike Ford	Shotgun Messenger	1885	Silver City
Linda Evans	Temperance Advocate	1885	Silver City
Chris Frey	School Marm	1885	Silver City
Sally Walker	Madam	1885	Silver City
Arlene Danison	Dress Maker	1885	Silver City
Laurel Sorelie	Miner's Wife	1877	Placer Mine
Vern Johnson	Miner	1877	Placer Mine
Gary Dolezal	Rancher	1900	Buckaroo Ranch

Figure 6
The living history characters developed during the training workshops will interpret five of the 11 dioramas in *Spirit of the West.*

Implementation and Evaluation

Schedule and Format

Once interpreter training was completed, Berrin, Armstrong, and Goodmonson designed a daily schedule that would best serve the museum's goals to engage as many visitors as possible (Berrin, 2006). Each day, museum theater programs will begin with a formal theater performance at 10:00 a.m. in a classroom in the museum's main building. The room is used for interpretive talks and special classes, but a riser stage will be added to make the room feel more like a theater. Armstrong as a fur trapper, the seasonal interpreter as a homesteader, and volunteers as stagecoach driver and ranch buckaroo will present twenty-minute monologues on the classroom stage. From 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. three living history environments, the Sawmill, Homestead, and *Spirit of the West*, will be active with volunteer interpreters. At 3:30 p.m., Armstrong, the seasonal interpreter, and volunteers will offer a demonstration featuring firearms, frontier cooking, or a crosscut saw. This packed schedule is designed to create lively environments throughout the museum where visitors can actively participate in living history (Berrin, 2006).

Two participants who finished the training serve as examples of the volunteers who will perform in *Spirit of the West.* Portraying an 1885 Wells-Fargo shotgun messenger stationed in the Silver City diorama and a horse rancher in the 1900 Buckaroo ranch section, they chat with museum visitors informally (see Figures 7 and 8) (M. Ford and G. Doleval, personal communication, April 27, 2006). The "shotgun messenger" tells a story about how he was once robbed by Black Bart, one of the most feared stage

robbers of the time. He discusses the scenario with visitors and asks them what they would do had they been in the same situation (M. Ford, personal communication, April 27, 2006). The rancher tells visitors about the one hundred wild mustangs he hopes to buy from the ranch. He invites them to participate in the performance. "How much do you think I should pay for one of them horses?" he asks them. "I hope I can get them for a dollar a head" (G. Dolezal, personal communication, April 27, 2006).

"What will you do with them after you buy them?" asks a visitor. The "rancher" explains that he hopes to hire a few of the Buckaroos at the ranch and then spend about three days driving them back to his own property where he and the Buckaroos will break the horses (G. Dolezal, personal communication, April 27, 2006). The performances by these two volunteers demonstrate the effectiveness of "living environmental theater" in engaging visitors.

Figure 7
Volunteer living history interpreter Mike Ford plays a shotgun messenger who protected Wells-Fargo cash boxes that were transported on stagecoaches in the 1880s.

Figure 8
Living history volunteer Gary Dolezal plays a ranch owner who worked with buckaroos at the turn of the 20th century.

Inactive Environments

The living history characters that the program has trained thus far illustrate a concern that permeates museum thinking today. The program is not including the voices of traditionally under-represented groups because volunteers, predominantly mature, white women, are only able to play age- and ethnic- appropriate roles. Armstrong is concerned that the program is telling only Anglo-European stories and wants to make the program more multicultural. Bend's overwhelmingly white population provides few opportunities for finding volunteers who could realistically take on ethnic roles. Armstrong would like to hire ethnic actors, but does not have a budget to do so (personal communication, March 23, 2006). Thus, several areas throughout the museum will remain static this year because there are not enough appropriate interpreters to people the environments. The Paiute Encampment, the Chinese Mercantile, and the Buckaroo Ranch will not have living history interpreters. Armstrong is adamant that "Native

American people tell Native American stories, Chinese people tell Chinese stories, and African Americans tell African American stories" (personal communication, March 23, 2006). Armstrong is currently recruiting members from the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs north of Bend, and seeking an Asian American volunteer. He is pleased that a new Hispanic volunteer has shown interest in developing a living history character. An African American member of the museum board has expressed interest in performing a monologue as well.

Evaluation

The living history program will be evaluated against its original goals to increase attendance, present museum content in a more engaging manner, and create learning experiences that support the museum's mission and include the interpretation of traditionally under-represented groups (S. Goodmonson, personal communication, April 7, 2006). Goodmonson plans to conduct post-program surveys to determine whether the program has met these goals. Using in-person surveys, Goodmonson wants to ask visitors if they attended the program, what they learned, whether they enjoyed the experience, and if they would return to encounter more characters (personal communication, April 7, 2006).

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Implication

Summary

History museums across America often exhibit simplified and even erroneous versions of history (Eichstedt & Small, 2002; Loewen, 1999). Yet they have a significant effect on what people learn about history. Therefore, misapprehensions in historical exhibits have contributed to a gap between public perceptions and academic understandings of history (Corkern, 2004; Loewen, 1999). History museums can help narrow this gap by focusing on two goals: 1.) Providing more complex historical interpretations that include several perspectives, and 2.) Presenting ideas and information in a manner that is agreeable and enjoyable to the public (e.g. Gardner, 2004; Leibhold, 2000; Rutherford & Shay, 2004). Accomplishing these goals simultaneously can be a challenge; museum professionals struggle to balance complex knowledge from academia with the need to interest and entertain visitors. Literature in the museum field suggests that museum theater is one technique through which museums may be able to accomplish these goals (e.g. Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1995).

Scholars and museum professionals agree that museum theater captures audiences of various age groups, backgrounds, and ethnicities, and is an excellent tool for presenting multiple perspectives and controversial issues (e.g. Bridal, 2004; Hughes, 1998). This study has described why and how High Desert Museum incorporated museum theater into the historical exhibit *Spirit of the West*.

What were the goals and motivations for establishing a museum theater program?

High Desert Museum's motivations for launching a museum theater program were closely related to the problem proposed by this study. I investigated museum theater as an agreeable presentation technique that would offer more complex and varied interpretations of the dioramas in *Spirit of the West*, and the motivations of HDM (to increase overall museum attendance, present museum content in a more engaging manner, and create learning experiences that support the museum's mission and include interpretations of traditionally under-represented groups) were directly related to this problem statement. HDM sought to make *Spirit of the West* and its other historical displays more engaging and historically accurate.

What processes were involved in developing the program?

HDM's decision to create an Audience Development Department that would oversee the Interpretation Department was essential to launching museum theater. As Director of Audience Development, Goodmonson was able to combine her proficiency in performance arts with the department's goal to build visitor-centered experiences. The experience and expertise of Berrin and Armstrong were also key factors in the program's development. The decision to hire one expert in natural history and one expert in cultural and living history helped create a dynamic relationship in which Berrin and Armstrong can be autonomous experts in their own areas, but can function under the umbrella of the strategic plans asserted by the Audience Development Department. Berrin's involvement in Armstrong's hiring process also helped ensure that the two would work well together.

The process for launching High Desert Museum's museum theater program was fundamentally different from that of other programs outlined in published case studies in two significant ways: 1) HDM volunteers, not staff members, were employed as the core of the program; and 2) There were no paid theater experts such as directors, actors, or stage managers involved in the day-to-day training process (Beck, 1999; Bridal, 2004; Jones, 1999). While four paid staff conduct daily living history and museum theater performances, there are not enough of them to fill the museum's extensive historical exhibits and make theater a significant part of visitors' experiences. To fill the need, volunteers have been trained as living history characters and have become the essence of the program.

Although current museum theater literature contends that it is much easier to teach actors about history than to teach history buffs how to act (Bridal, 2004; Beck, 1999), HDM's volunteer training workshops were highly successful as a means not only for generating excitement and enthusiasm about the program, but also for preparing volunteers for their roles as living history interpreters. Armstrong's focus on research and historical scholarship is perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the enhancement of historical exhibits. He was a "stickler" for accuracy, but this propensity has helped volunteers develop characters. For example, one character, Mona, an 1865-bordello madam, is presented as historically correct as possible thanks to extensive research (S. Walker, personal communication, April 27, 2006). And volunteers enjoyed the training process. In fact, the workshops were so successful that word-of-mouth among volunteers has sparked an overwhelming interest in the program and prompted a

second round of training to begin in July (M. Carbiener, personal communication, April 12, 2006).

The program's development process also differed from recommendations in current literature on the matter of using theater professionals such as directors or stage managers in training interpreters (e.g. Beck, 1999; Bridal, 2004). Instead, volunteer Dr. Marion Woodall donated her time and expertise to help volunteers improve their presentation techniques. Strong staff leadership from Goodmonson, Berrin, and Armstrong as well as the motivation and dedication of the volunteers made it possible to use unpaid interpreters as the central human resource for the program.

The $25,000 grant from the Bend Foundation was used to hire the seasonal interpreter, begin a wardrobe and prop collection, and pay for initial training costs, thereby ensuring the program would be ready for presentation by summer 2006. However, funding was not allocated to make certain each objective for the program was met. Specifically, the goal to offer more interpretations of traditionally under-represented groups was not specifically funded. Ethnic actors were not hired and volunteers that could play ethnic roles were not successfully recruited. Thus, the likelihood of living history interpretation of Native Americans, Chinese, African Americans, and Hispanics was significantly reduced.

What kind of theater has been implemented in Spirit of the West?

Living history volunteers have been trained to perform "living environmental theater," in which interpreters talk with visitors and invite them to become part of the

performance through conversation or action. It also appears that volunteers are comfortable performing in this way.

Has museum theater enhanced Spirit of the West?

Whether museum theater, specifically living history, has enhanced *Spirit of the West* is a complicated question. It is possible to evaluate the effectiveness of program development in terms of resource management and process. However, returning to the goal of investigating the viability of museum theater as a presentation technique for engaging audiences in more complete and complex historical narratives, analyzing the value of the performances and presentations offered in *Spirit of the West* is more complicated. A complete analysis of the effect of museum theater on the historical understanding of an audience is beyond the scope of this study. However, "enhancement" of the exhibit can be discussed from the researcher's informed perspective, though it does not include quantitative evidence of the program's educational value or of audience engagement. For the purposes of this analysis, "enhancement" is defined as the increased variety of perspectives and a greater depth of information offered in the exhibit. Specifically, do living history interpreters in *Spirit of the West* offer additional information that is not included in the standing exhibit, and are the experiences and perspectives of traditionally under-represented groups included?

The structure and content of the living history presentations suggests general conclusions regarding the program's ability to enhance *Spirit of the West*. Living history interpreters are not diverse enough in age, ethnicity, or interest areas to provide the varied first person interpretations that are needed to enhance the exhibit. Only 5 of the 11

sections in *Spirit of the West* have living history interpreters: Fur Traders' Fort, 1826; Applegate Trail, 1853; Placer Mine, 1877; Silver City Settlement, 1885; and Buckaroo Ranch, 1900. The museum relinquished control over deciding which sections of the exhibit would be "peopled" by living history characters by encouraging volunteers to choose their own characters and interest areas. This decision may have been effective in recruiting and maintaining volunteers in the training process; however, it has resulted in an uneven distribution of characters and sets. Another limitation is the lack of young people and ethnic diversity among living history interpreters. According to literature in the field, Armstrong was correct to insist that volunteers play only age- and ethnic-appropriate roles (Bridal, 2004). Therefore, the age and ethnicity of characters is limited by the age and ethnicity of volunteers. Of the 14 living history volunteers presenting characters in the *Spirit of the West*, five are men and eight are women, all are white, and only one is under 40 years old.

The cast of predominantly female, white, mature characters suggests that living history has not helped diversify *Spirit of the West* in terms of varied perspectives, particularly interpretations of traditionally under-represented audiences. However, some characters are poised to discuss and answer questions about other groups of people. For example, in the Applegate Trail diorama, a volunteer playing the role of a wife and mother traveling the Trail is prepared to talk about her family's interaction with Indians. Through Armstrong's workshops, volunteers have learned to field questions about Native American encounters with pioneers and research has prepared them to dispel popular myths. While an informed discussion about American Indians may add depth to

a visitor's understanding, it is not a replacement for the Native American story told from the perspective of a Native person. Similarly, the volunteer playing the rancher discusses the Buckaroo culture, but he cannot interpret the life of a Mexican Buckaroo from the first person perspective.

The lack of ethnic and age diversity is the most evident and immediate problem facing the museum theater program. The absence of multiculturalism among living history interpreters directly impedes museum goals to increase audience attendance among the two target markets of 45- to 64-year-old "history buffs" and traditionally under-served audiences, particularly Native peoples and Hispanics. While history buffs may appreciate the opportunity to chat with and learn from an emigrant, an assayer, or a placer miner, historians and museum professionals have noted that the lack of complexity and varied perspectives in historical exhibits can bore or disappoint history connoisseurs (Corkern, 2004; Hobbs, 2002). Racial homogeneity also hinders museum goals to increase interpretation of traditionally under-represented racial groups. While Armstrong is currently working to recruit volunteers and board members to interpret history from these perspectives, the program has been launched without the "hidden voices" museum theater could so aptly address. Armstrong admits that by telling only the story of Anglo-Europeans, the museum will easily fall into a trap with its critics. He is determined that by next year, participation will include more diverse roles (personal communication, March 23, 2006). If the museum hopes to increase and diversify museum audiences and perspectives, human and financial resources must be committed to recruiting and/or hiring racial and ethnic interpreters.

Although the program lacks ethnic diversity, the exhibit has been enhanced with other perspectives that contribute to its depth. Specifically, the characters' social and economic positions in their communities are relatively varied. One example is the volunteer who plays Mona, a bordello madam from Silver City. A gate in the exhibit corner and an etched glass sign above it reading, "Mona's," are the only physical representations of the bordello; thus it is unlikely that most visitors notice this portion of the exhibit. The character, however, provides the opportunity to draw attention to Mona's and to challenge assumptions about madams and bordellos in the American West. Madams were often respected for protecting women and providing health care to the community. Bordellos provided safe houses for women who needed to escape from abusive husbands or fathers, and in the absence of a doctor, Bordellos provided medicine and cared for the sick (S. Walker, personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Mona and other characters in *Spirit of the West* are examples of what Armstrong describes as "Mr. and Mrs. Mundane" (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). Armstrong is convinced that, unlike the exceptional lives of characters like William Clark or Kit Carson, these everyday people are effective conduits for teaching what the past was really like, "History doesn't always deal with themes and topics that are pleasant or comfortable for some people," he says (personal communication, March 23, 2006). Nonetheless, interpretation from these perspectives is essential in helping to create historical consciousness among museum visitors.

The lack of academic input during program development suggests that living history interpreters are not informed about the latest historical research. A Historic

Review Committee, comprised of Armstrong, several volunteers, and the museum's curator, meets periodically to discuss museum goals for historic interpretation. However, the committee does not contribute directly to the interpretations created by volunteers (B. Armstrong, personal communication, March 23, 2006). Even if the committee were to assess living history characters, it could not serve as a substitute for an academic historian whose job it is to produce current research. The absence of a historian is a serious flaw in the program's structure. If the museum hopes to become a respected destination that interprets the American West, it must employ or contract a professional historian.

The stories and discussions offered by living history characters in *Spirit of the West* provide visitors with a greater depth of information and historical understanding than the exhibit offered previously. Though the lack of multiculturalism and current research is a significant problem, the attention to research and presentation techniques among volunteers have made the interpreters excellent resources for increased historical understanding. Still, it is essential for current interpreters to address the lives of people who are not represented by first person characters. Without discussion of African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, the living history program will only perpetuate ideas that these groups were absent or unimportant characters in the history of the American West.

Implications

The evidence from this case study implies that museum theater is an exciting technique for presenting complete and complex history to the public. High Desert

Museum's training process and use of resources suggests that a volunteer-driven museum theater program has promising potential. Volunteers can be mobilized to be enthusiastic, dedicated, and talented museum theater participants. The evidence presented here challenges the conviction among many museum professionals that professional theater experts and actors are required to develop a successful program (e.g., Beck, 1999; Bridal, 2004). The unconventional use of volunteers for High Desert Museum's museum theater program makes this study a valuable resource for institutions considering a museum theater program.

I have discussed the challenges associated with creating an ethnically diverse group of interpreters from volunteers in a homogenous community. While it is possible to train volunteers to become excellent living history performers, the cast of characters, and therefore the perspectives offered through living history, is bound by the demographics of a volunteer corps. Although the race, ethnicity, and age of volunteers will vary depending on the organization, it is reasonable to assume that this challenge would be present at most museums in the region. With careful consideration, funding and time could be re-allocated to better ensure a diverse staff of interpreters. Additional problems presented by the exclusion of an academic historian can also be easily repaired. The museum should contract a professional historian from the local university system to evaluate the content of living history presentations.

Recommendations

A comprehensive evaluation of museum theater at High Desert Museum is necessary to determine whether the program is educating and engaging audiences. While

the museum plans to survey visitors to find out what theater programs they liked and what they learned, additional information needs to be collected to determine whether museum theater is increasing the depth of visitors' historical understanding. For example, evaluators could compare the amount of time visitors spend in *Spirit of the West* when there are no living history interpreters in the exhibit to the amount of time visitors spend when living history interpreters are present. Timing museum visitors could be an unobtrusive way of capturing information, because additional time spent may suggest that visitors are learning more in the exhibit.

A comparative survey could also gauge changes in visitor perceptions of the topics in *Spirit of the West*. Visitors could be asked about their perceptions of topics such as encounters between emigrant and Native Americans on the Applegate Trail or Chinese influences on settlement towns before they entered the exhibit and again after they finished. These surveys could be completed with and without living history interpreters in order to compare the influence of interpreters on levels of visitor understanding. Voluntary questionnaires that ask questions such as, "What did you learn today that surprised you?" or "Did you experience anything in the exhibit that conflicted with your beliefs about history?" would also provide useful information. Results from surveys and questionnaires would help inform High Desert Museum as well scholars in the field of museums and history about the ability of theater to affect historical understanding.

This research study at High Desert Museum demonstrates that training volunteers is a viable approach to implementing living history and museum theater. Strong leadership from experienced and energetic individuals and a dedicated volunteer

corps helped ensure the program would be successfully produced. The most significant challenges to the program can be addressed by re-allocating time and funding. Continual evaluation and modification of the program could make museum theater a significant contributor to the historical understanding of visitors to the High Desert Museum.

Museum theater is an exciting technique with which museums could offer more complete and complex historical interpretations. Well-produced theater has the ability to engage audiences and present complex historical narratives. By extension, it may also help narrow the gap between academic and public understandings of history and help create historical consciousness.

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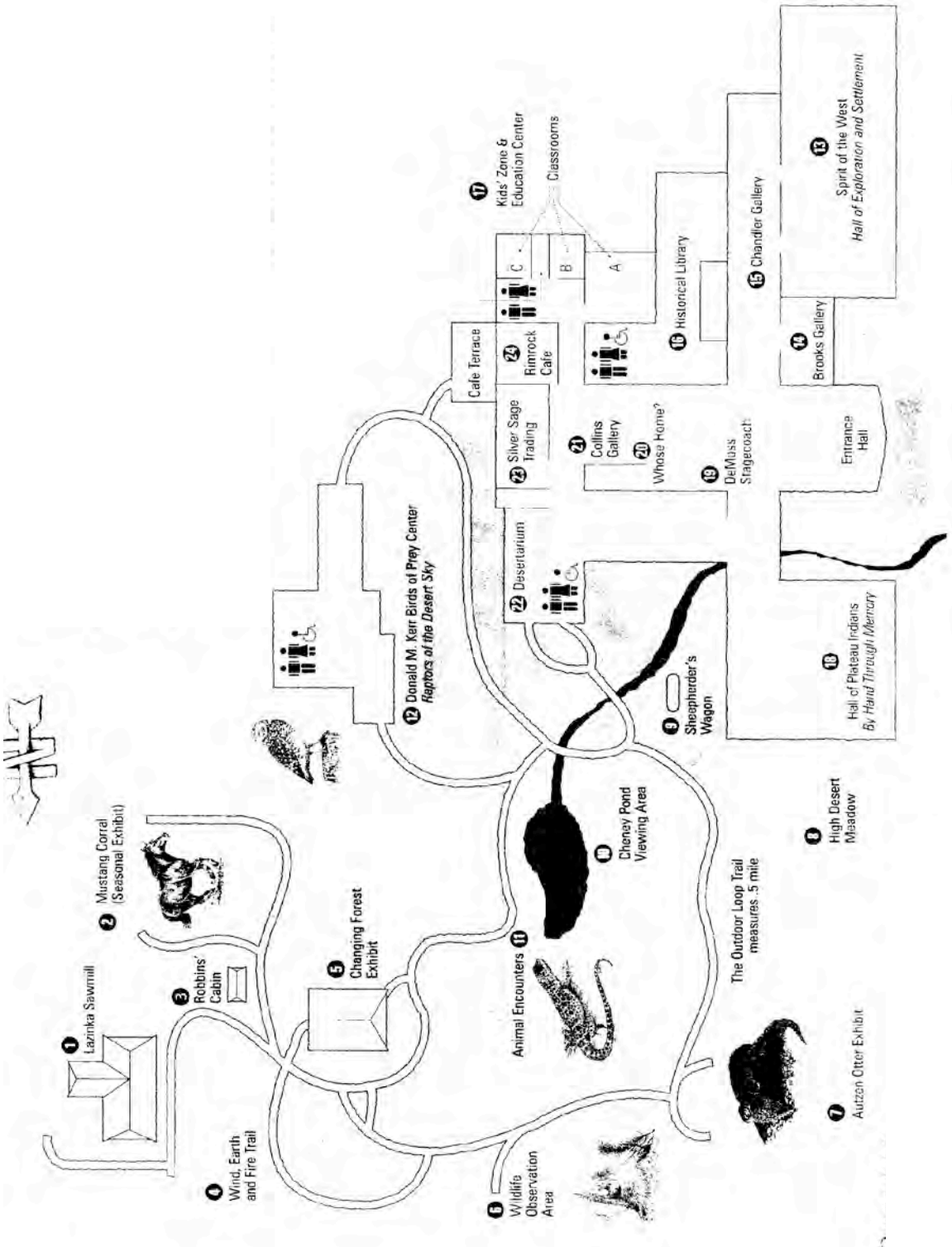
Appendixes

Appendix A
Map of High Desert Museum Grounds



Appendix B
Map for *New Horizon* Long-term Plan

Appendix C
Recruitment Letter

<Date>

<Name>
<Address>
<City/State/Zip>

Dear <Potential Interviewee>,

You are invited to participate in a graduate research study titled *Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theatre*, conducted by Ann Craig from the University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore the benefits of and describe the process for developing and implementing museum theatre for historical exhibits concerning the settlement of the American West.

Scholars and museum professionals agree that there is a gap between academic and public understandings of history. While it is often suggested that history museums could help lessen this gap by providing more complete and complex historical narratives, there are few studies suggesting precise techniques with which to accomplish these goals. This study addresses this lack of scholarship by exploring museum theatre as a program that could enhance historical exhibits in museums. In the form of a case study, this research will address the perceived benefits of a museum theatre program and the process for developing and implementing the program at High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Results from this study may be published as a set of recommendations in the form of "lessons learned" that offer guidance to other museums attempting to undertake a similar process and may also contribute to the body of knowledge on how history is learned and reported.

You were selected to participate in this graduate research study because of your leadership position High Desert Museum and experience and expertise pertinent to museum theatre. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in two in-person interviews, lastly approximately one hour each between January and March 2006. If you wish, interview questions will be provided before the interview for your consideration. Interviews will take place at High Desert Museum or at more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this study from your supervisor and/or institution to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (541) 968-1118 or acraig@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Janice Rutherford at (541) 346-2296. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office of Human Subjects Compliance, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541)346-2510.

Thank you in advance for you interest and consideration. I will contact you shortly to speak about your potential involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Ann Craig

Appendix D
Letter of Consent

Research Protocol Number: X296-06

Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theatre

Ann Craig, Principal Investigator
University of Oregon, Arts and Administration Program

You are invited to participate in a graduate research study titled *Creating Historical Consciousness: A Case Study Exploring Museum Theatre*, conducted by Ann Craig from the University of Oregon Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore the benefits of and describe the process for developing and implementing museum theatre for historical exhibits concerning the settlement of the American West.

Scholars and museum professionals agree that there is a gap between academic and public understandings of history. While it is often suggested that history museums could help lessen this gap by providing more complete and complex historical narratives, there are few studies suggesting precise techniques with which to accomplish these goals. This study addresses this lack of scholarship by exploring museum theatre as a program that could enhance historical exhibits in museums. In the form of a case study, this research will address the perceived benefits of a museum theatre program and the process for developing and implementing the program in the historical exhibit *Spirit of the West* at High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. Results from this study may be published as a set of recommendations in the form of "lessons learned" that offer guidance to other museums attempting to undertake a similar process and may also contribute to the body of knowledge on how history is learned and reported.

You were selected to participate in this graduate research study because of your leadership position with High Desert Museum and experience and expertise pertinent to museum theatre. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to provide relevant organizational materials and participate in two in-person interviews, lastly approximately one hour each between February and April 2006. If you wish, interview questions will be provided before the interview for your consideration. Interviews will take place at High Desert Museum or at more conveniently located site. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use an audio tape recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email. There are minimal social and economic risks associated with participating in this study, particularly since this phase of research is exploratory in nature. You may face minimal risk you if offer information considered inappropriate by your organization or other affiliates.

Information collected in this study will be associated with your name and organization, with your permission. However, if you would prefer to protect your confidentiality, your information will be identified with a pseudonym. You may initial your preference on the next form. However, even with the use of a pseudonym, there is still a possibility that loss of confidentiality may occur because your identity could be inferred from the content of the information you have given. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this study from your supervisor and/or institution to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Should you choose to consent to the use of audiotapes, the tapes will be destroyed one year after the conclusion of the project.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to history museums as a whole, especially those concerning the history of the American West. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (541) 968-1118 or acraig@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Janice Rutherford at (541) 346-2296. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office of Human Subjects Compliance, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541)346-2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statement to indicate your consent:

_____ I consent to the use of audiotapes and note taking during my interview.

_____ I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from theis study.

_____ I wish to maintain my confidentiality in this study through the use of a pseudonym.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Ann Craig

1381 Lawrence #5
Eugene, OR 97401
(541)968-1118
acraig@uoregon.edu

Appendix E
Interview Questions: Bill Armstrong

INTERVIEW FORM

Case Study: *Date:*

Key terms:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent:

- ❑ Oral
- ❑ Written Form
- ❑ Audio Recording
- ❑ OK to Quote

- ❑ Member check needed
- ❑ No member check needed

Notes on Interview Context:

CODING	*INFORMATION*	*NOTES*

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. How was the idea of museum theatre brought to the organization?
2. How did you come to work on this project? (work at HDM)
3. What skills or expertise to you have related to living history?
4. What are your goals for the program? How does the program fit with the strategic plan and mission at HDM?
5. How did you begin the development process?
6. How have you recruited participants? Demographics?
7. Are you concerned about the demographic diversity? In other words, how are you comprehensively portraying western expansion?
8. How have you trained participants?
9. How will you evaluate participants?
10. How will you evaluate the program?
11. What have been your biggest challenges so far?
12. What is the role of historical scholarship?
13. What is the project budget?
14. Have any outside resources been consulted? Collaborators?

Appendix E
Interview Questions: Bill Armstrong

INTERVIEW FORM

Case Study: *Date:*

Key terms:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent:

- ❑ Oral
- ❑ Written Form
- ❑ Audio Recording
- ❑ OK to Quote

- ❑ Member check needed
- ❑ No member check needed

Notes on Interview Context:

CODING	*INFORMATION*	*NOTES*

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

15. How was the idea of museum theatre brought to the organization?

16. How did you come to work on this project? (work at HDM)

17. What skills or expertise to you have related to living history?

18. What are your goals for the program? How does the program fit with the strategic plan and mission at HDM?

19. How did you begin the development process?

20. How have you recruited participants? Demographics?

21. Are you concerned about the demographic diversity? In other words, how are you comprehensively portraying western expansion?

22. How have you trained participants?

23. How will you evaluate participants?

24. How will you evaluate the program?

25. What have been your biggest challenges so far?

26. What is the role of historical scholarship?

27. What is the project budget?

28. Have any outside resources been consulted? Collaborators?

Appendix F
Interview Form: Larry Berrin

INTERVIEW FORM

Case Study: *Date:*

Key terms:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent:

- ❑ Oral
- ❑ Written Form
- ❑ Audio Recording
- ❑ OK to Quote

- ❑ Member check needed
- ❑ No member check needed

Notes on Interview Context:

CODING	*INFORMATION*	*NOTES*

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. How was the idea of museum theatre brought to the organization? How were was the program initiated?

2. How does your job description fit into the museum theater program?

3. What are the specific goals of implementing a museum theatre program? Visitorship? Mission? Scholarship?

4. Have you have support or resistance from senior staff? Employees?

5. What priorities/directions have you been given?

6. What priorities/directions have you given to the project managers?

7. At this point in the process, are there challenges to the program with which you are concerned?

8. How do you view the role of historical scholarship in this program?

9. Do you expect to have to consult outside experts? Who?

10. How will you be evaluated in terms of this project?

11. How will you evaluate the development of this process?

12. How will you evaluate the program's success?

13. How is this project funded? Grant? Operating budget? Future growth?

14. Where do you see this project in 3 years? 5 years? Ultimately?

15. How will the museum benefit from a museum theatre program?

Appendix G
Interview Questions: Sharon Goodmonson

INTERVIEW FORM

Case Study: *Date:*

Key terms:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent:

- ❑ Oral
- ❑ Written Form
- ❑ Audio Recording
- ❑ OK to Quote
- ❑ Member check needed
- ❑ No member check needed

Notes on Interview Context:

CODING	*INFORMATION*	*NOTES*

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. How was the idea of museum theatre brought to the organization?

2. What are the specific goals of implementing a museum theatre program? Visitorship? Mission? Scholarship?

3. How did you begin the process of developing this program? Why was this individual chosen?

4. Did you have support or resistance from senior staff? Employees?

5. What priorities/directions did you give to the project managers?

6. At this point in the process, are there challenges to the program with which you are concerned?

7. How do you view the role of historical scholarship in this program?

8. Do you expect to have to consult outside experts? Who?

9. How will you evaluate the development of this process?

10. How will you evaluate the program's success?

11. How is this project funded? Grant? Operating budget? Future growth?

12. Where do you see this project in 3 years? 5 years? Ultimately?

13. How will the museum benefit from a museum theatre program?

Appendix H
Cultural Interpretation Five Year Strategic Plan

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM
CULTURAL INTERPRETATION FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Desired Visitor Cognitive and Affective Experiences

- Understanding their heritage
- Understanding and appreciating other points of view
- Having an enjoyable experience
- Understanding how to make a difference
- Feeling empowered to make a difference
- Understanding the High Desert is alive ("More than meets the eye")
- Making emotional connections with High Desert resources
- Understanding cause and effect as it relates to decisions and consequences for High Desert resources
- Having meanings revealed
- Provoking to thought
- Feeling transformed to stewardship of resources

Desired Visitor Experiences by End of Five-Year Planning Period (2006-2011)

- Children will write and act in their own High Desert play and in their own living history characters
- Visitors will role play with Museum interpreters to make choices and see consequences (e.g., moving Native Americans off ancestral land, clearing land for cultivation, women on the Oregon trail)
- Visitors will see scripted theatrical performances that connect visitors with historic characters
- Visitors can participate in multi-day immersion "camps for families (e.g., Sutter's Mill in California, "Frontier House" television program)
- The Museum is THE forum for cutting edge programs/panels/symposia/conferences on the humanities (e.g., readings, discussion groups, visiting scholars)
- The Museum begins humanities publications (e.g., literary periodical, "High Country News")
- The Museum is THE site for annual professional conferences and training for cultural organizations (e.g., ALHFAM, AASLH, AAM, WMA)
- The Museum is a campus for humanities scholarship with local universities (e.g., OSU, U of O), particularly with respect to Museum Studies and cultural interpretation (living history and museum theater)

Appendix I
Character Score

DRAFT

Name: Bill Armstrong

Character Name: William Josiah Tucker
Current Year: 1838
Age: 35
D.O.B. 10/01/1803 born in Hopewell, Prince George County Virginia.
Residence: (Familial Home) Cape Girardeau (County and nearest town) on Turkey Creek near the LaBont Farm.

Family

Parents: Wallace Tucker
Elizabeth Clark Blair
Uncle Charles William Tucker

Siblings: Caleb (22) -1816, Augustus (31), Agatha (33)

Marriages:
Siblings

- Jonathan married Genevieve Labont (15), June 1834
- August remarries after death of first wife in winter1829, Jamima Clark August 1833
- Agatha marries Ezra Towne and moves to Illinois or Indiana in 1823

Self

- Married to Nez Perce/Cayuse woman "White Elk Robe Woman" or "Sally" in 1835. She dies in the same year, Winter1835 of " Ague" after a trip to the Willamette Valley.

Children:
Sophia Tucker (1835) at Whitman Mission under care of the Mission Staff
Education:
2 years of steady schooling. Taught reading and ciphering by Uncle in Harrodsburg Kentucky during tailoring apprenticeship.

Religion: Family Anglican although when young raised around the Catholic faith around Missouri Creole community of Cape Girardeau. Not particularly religious.

Present Circumstances:

My Immediate Circumstances:
After 15 years in the Rocky Mountains and Oregon Country now have a nest egg to start over with the Beaver disappearing. I can't decide whether to go back to Missouri or to "Wilomet" Valley and settle near other trappers on the Yamhill River.

My Social Life:
Visit my wife's people for the winter camp along the Winaha River. Meet trappers at Summer Rendezvous.

My Physical Existence:
Trapping with Fur Companies as hunter or trapper supplying meet for camps and taking my share of the fur bounty I can trap. I Worked with Wyeth's Pacific Fish and Fur Company until 1835. Also guide with Bill Williams in 1832 for Capt. Bonneville.

My Temperament could be described as:
Curious and Jovial: But, concerned and troubled by changes in the West at this time. The recent tide of Missionaries while convenient for my daughter's upbringing is the first signs of the civilized world and troubling to me.

In Groups I tend to:
Hang back and be observant, but with a touch of Rye I can spin yarns and reminisce with the best of them.

I am most interested in:
Finding a new way of living. Settling in the "Wilomet" and settling down and start farming or raising horses near the Yamhill River. I like to read good books when the y can be had.

I am least interested in:
Politics concerning the future of the Britain in the Oregon country. I also don't like talking about my two run ins with the Blackfeet as they are unpleasant memories. I also don't like discussing the demise of my wife.

Occupation:
Recently free trapper, prior to that form the Pacific Fish and Fur Company. Also have guided with Bill Williams. Beaver is becoming scarce, considering heading back to the Platte country and hunting buffalo.

Community Connections:
Connected to the Military as a guide. Worked as a hunter under Sublette and again with Capt. Thing for Wyeth. Connected to the Winaha band of the Nez Perce through wife's relations. Also friendly with the Cayuse along the upper Umatilla river.

PAST

I come from:
English background via Virginia and the middleground. Farming family although my uncle was ambitious and took up a trade as a tailor. My mother's people were the same stock although related distantly to Virginia planters.

Family Conditions:

I was raised mostly by my uncle as my father was often out along the river working on boats when not planting. My brothers and I put in the crops. This lack of male role model led to me being "intemperate" and under my Uncle's tutelage until I left and headed up the Missouri river and onward to the Prairie when I was 22.

Strongest Cultural Influences:

My mother's Scottish heritage, my father's backwoods English culture of the Kentucky Middleground and my uncle's too. Kentucky whiskey and corn planting culture. The City of Lexington was what put me off from urban life.

Experiences making the strongest impression on me were:

Staying with my Uncle from the age of 12 to 22. While a noble and trust worthy man, the urban environment and hazards to a wayward lad of cards, dice, and whiskey were too much. At 22 returned home briefly and tried farming with my cantankerous brother. I briefly entertained going to Tejas with Stephan Austin's colony as the people there were friendly to those who associated with papists.

In 1824 I officially leave home for good. Signing on with Ashley Henry to take goods to the rendezvous on the Henry's fork of the Green River, I became a trapper for the outfit. I made good friends with another young man named Jim Bridger who preferred being called "Ol' Gabe".

Most Influential People:

My Uncle with whom I was taught what it was to be a man.